

# **Reviewers' Evaluation for Public Charter School Application**

## **INSPIRE ME ACADEMY (IMA)**

October 1, 2015

Review Team: Shelley Reed (Chair), Jana Lapoint and Michael Wilhelm

### **A. Education Plan**

#### **A.1. Mission, Vision, Identification of targeted student population and the community the school hopes to serve**

##### Strengths

- The mission and vision is concise and shows a desire to inspire and help all students to succeed.
- Providing free meals and free uniforms levels the playing field.
- Identifies the target population.
- Identifies longer school days and time as enhancing student learning opportunities.
- There is an articulated vision: extended day, extended year, 6 monitoring periods, teacher professional development time.

##### Questions, Concerns

- Focus on “college preparatory” does not take into consideration preparation for students that will be entering the workforce.
- While statistics on the catchment area are presented the application does not present a persuasive explanation of how the proposed mission, curriculum, teaching methods and services are likely to meet the needs of the target population.
- There is limited evidence to suggest the school’s plan is directly aligned to all elements of a proficiency-based system.
- There is little evidence of direct connection of curriculum to ideology.
- Expect teachers to do a lot with minimal resources.
- Concern as to how will teachers get up to speed at outset given extensive curriculum expectations.

## A.2. Academic Program

### Strengths

- A foreign language will be offered in grades 4-8.
- A full time foreign language teacher is to be part of staff.
- Understanding by Design as a sound planning tool is provided as a template for lesson development.
- Standards based, use common core.

### Questions, Concerns

- The application does not provide evidence of a curriculum outline for core subjects- only selected ELA and Math lessons pulled from websites.
- No evidence of an understanding of teaching strategies, only suggested lessons and reference to websites such as Engage NY, Eureka Math are presented.
- No evidence of recognition of the Guiding Principles, Maine Learning Results as guiding Maine schools is given reference is made to the Common Core which is ELA and Math.
- Health and Career and Educational Development are not represented.
- Science is included only as an “as often as possible”, arts is represented as “a way to add fun and creativity”, and there seems to be no allotted time for technology.
- Curriculum design hinges on teachers to be hired in July without a foundational basis and given only 2 months before school opens to create classroom content without compensation.
- There are few co-curricular and extracurricular programs.
- Proposal references Achievement First as a model for the Inspire Me program, but does not provide evidence of the models success.
- No curriculum outline as expected, not all curriculum areas are addressed or standards alignment.

## A.3. Special Student Populations

### Strengths

- Inclusion model.
- Will use RTI , six week progress monitoring, full time special education teacher for 3 grades, inclusion.

### Questions, Concerns

- Special Education process and procedures are very limited and weak, particularly Child Find, referral and eligibility, continuum of services, and progress monitoring.

- Plan does not address an understanding of serving the full range of needs of students with disabilities including the appropriate discipline procedures for students with disabilities.
- Plan does not demonstrate an understanding of, and capacity to meet, state and federal requirements regarding the identification and education of students with disabilities and 504 plans.
- The use of outdated language indicates an inadequate knowledge of current practices, policies, and procedures for informing a sound special education program.
- No continuum of services provided.
- No provision for child find, ELL and limited explanation of other processes like referral.
- It is unclear how they will address the needs of accelerated learners.

#### **A.4. Assessment**

##### Strengths

- Plan sets aside Friday time for teachers to meet to look at data.
- Every 6 weeks, time is set aside to monitor progress and assess for modifications necessary for student learning.
- States statewide data is to be used to set goals.
- Inspire ME intends to have a grading system that is understandable by parents, with quarterly reports.

##### Questions, Concerns

- No specific data sets are given for the 6-week progress-check and adjustments.
- It is not clear what the Inspire ME system of assessment, both formative and summative, locally and statewide looks like, or what a grading policy addresses.
- Fountas and Pinnell (given 3 times a year) and Math homegrown assessments are to be used; it is unspecified how other content areas are to be assessed. .

#### **A.5. School Climate and Discipline**

##### Strengths

- Inspire Me seeks to provide a safe and supportive school by its emphasis on “GREAT” values such as respect, kindness, positive attitude, and will bring character education into the classroom( 30 minutes on Fridays).
- The Head of School will conduct staff development in school climate and be a resource for

behavioral issues.

- The plan addresses parent engagement through volunteer efforts, parent-student breakfasts, performances and movie nights.
- Discipline will be set through clear expectations, re-direction and time outs
- Positive reinforcement.
- Some evidence of parent involvement.
- Behavioral policies are appropriate.

#### Questions, Concerns

- Page 155 of the application expresses Inspire ME's "right to disenrollment of a student if a student's behavior is having an adverse /unsafe effect on the learning community." It does not indicate expulsion procedures according to state statute.
- Pro-kindness policies do not include the full spectrum of student behaviors and safeguards.
- Unclear how, or if, will parents be involved in disciplinary decisions.

## **Education Plan Summary**

Is the Education Plan compelling? Are we convinced that the applicant make a strong case for the quality of the program? Describe why or why not.

- The Education Plan is not compelling and is incomplete. The desire to want all students to feel capable of success is not met by a comprehensive plan grounded in curriculum development, teaching strategies or system of assessment, or special education continuum of services. The curriculum is yet to be developed in this application.

Does the Education Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.

- The mission and vision speaks to all students succeeding but the plan does not support a comprehensive method for achieving that goal or a clear understanding of differentiation to meet student needs.

## **B. Organizational Plan**

### **B.1. School Calendar and Daily Schedule**

#### Strengths

- School Calendar indicates more time per day and more days per year exceeding state equivalent of hours of instruction

- Longer day, longer year means more time on task. Group and regroup of instruction.

#### Questions, Concerns

- Plan does not articulate specifics about classroom activities given a longer day.

## **B.2. Student Recruitment and Enrollment**

#### Strengths

- Inspire Me has a Facebook page and a Web page.
- Wants to attract low income, under achieving students, wants to attract those not satisfied with the local school results.

#### Questions, Concerns

- Enrollment projections are not supported by evidence of actual potential demand.
- Community meetings have netted less than modest response.
- No defined monitoring plan for student attendance and truancy.
- There doesn't appear to be a connection between out-reach activities described and the target population.
- Little evidence of local dissatisfaction with area schools.

## **B.3. Staffing and Human Resources**

#### Strengths

- Inspire ME projected funding for staffing positions, benefits, and staff development.
- The Marzano evaluation system for the Head of School, and for teachers, is cited to be used.
- The number of teaching staff to projected student population seems adequate.
- Provided some health benefits for full-time staff.

#### Questions, Concerns

- Employee Handbook is a template draft only, and is not specifically geared for their school.
- Staff development days are specified, but content of an induction, orientation are not specified yet teachers are expected to be developing curriculum and assessments in pre-opening time.
- Weekly Professional development time depends on volunteers.

- It is unclear whether there will be sufficient time for professional development considering the curriculum development expectations for the teachers.
- The expectation for Head of school to be responsible for professional development means that hiring for the position is critical to its success.
- There is an overly large expectation being placed on the head of School.
- It is unclear if there is time and resources for staff development.

#### **B.4. Pre-Opening Plan**

##### Strengths

- Pre-opening plan shows some awareness of what is needed for compliance.

##### Questions, Concerns

- Pre-opening and hiring Head of School and staff does not seem to leave time for curriculum, assessment development, or teacher preparation prior to opening school.

#### **B.5. Management and Operation**

##### Strengths

- Delineates the Head of School tasks as school leader, student development, teacher evaluator and behavioral resource.
- A Dean of Students is to be added in subsequent years.
- Viable staffing plan considering the size of the school.

##### Questions, Concerns

- Fleshing out of financial policies and procedures has been left to an Operations Manager without guidelines or priorities.

## B.6. Community Development

### Strengths

- Board founder and president connected to the community and shared outreach efforts at the interview on October 1, 2015.
- Typical parent involvement plan.

### Questions, Concerns

- Application does not establish a vision and strategy for community involvement.
- Contact with the local school district has been only on possible transportation arrangement.
- Community involvement tentative.
- Parent involvement critical. Not much community involvement articulated. Transportation arrangement with local school system is only tentative.
- There is not a comprehensive plan to involve the community.

## Management and Operations Summary

Are we convinced that the school has an effective plan to recruit, retain and grow an outstanding staff? Describe why or why not.

- The management and operations plan does not make a convincing argument that it has an effective plan to recruit, retrain and grow an outstanding staff. The plan lacks a framework and an understanding from which policies and practices can be developed.
- There is plan but it is uncertain if the extended year and day will affect recruitment and retention.

Does the Management and Operations Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.

- The mission and vision express a desire for all students to succeed, yet staff have extensive workloads without a comprehensive plan.
- It looks to parents, as well as staff, to provide programs so that the unique elements of the vision can be realized.

## C. Governance

### C. 1. Governing Body

#### Strengths

- Founder and Board members are passionate about the mission and vision of the school.
- The Governing Board is an independent functioning entity.
- Has completed 501C3.
- Board is independent.
- Has plan to evaluate staff.

#### Questions, Concerns

- The Governing Board, which is too small in number, lacks the diverse skills necessary to support the charter school in all aspects of academics, operations, governance and finances.
- There is not a clear sense of the role of the Advisory Committee in decision making.
- While there is a plan to evaluate the Head of School, the application lacks appropriate plans to evaluate the success of the school.
- Governing Board has no defined terms of office or succession.
- No plan to evaluate school.
- Not clear the degree to which this small board will have to depend upon planned advisory committee(s).
- By-laws are just a copy of others and need to be more tailored to fit the needs of this school.

### C. 2. Governing Board Composition

#### Strengths

- Governance documents are in order.
- The Founder and existing Governing Board members show passion for the creation of a charter school demonstrated by their submission of the application which is an extensive effort.
- Board shows commitment to its vision and mission and willingness to commit time and energy.

#### Questions, Concerns

- With small board membership they do not have the ability to outline roles and relationships at this time.
- In the Board resumes, members don't express a clear sense of their roles to oversee the operation of a charter school.



- The existing Board members do not represent the necessary diverse skills to ensure that the organization has a clear plan for the present and future viability of the school.
- Such a small board places greater demands on each member re: time commitment and involvement.
- It is unclear how the board will evaluate its work.

## **Governance Summary**

Are we convinced that the Board members and Executive Leadership have the skills, background and understanding of their roles necessary to make this a viable and sustainable public charter school? Describe why or why not.

- There is no evidence to suggest that the existing Governing Board members have the wide range of knowledge, skills and understanding of their roles to oversee a charter school including educational, financial and legal expertise.
- It remains uncertain whether this Board has the full complement of skills and understanding to be successful. The uncertainty is based on its small size, and the lack of organizational management experience among its members. The application places a heavy reliance on the Head of School and Operations Manager as well as volunteer, pro bono advice to meet its needs.

Does the Governance Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.

- Although the plan reiterates the desire that the charter school wants students to be successful, the Board does not articulate diverse skill sets or strength in leadership to operationalize the mission.
- The plan has been built to support the vision and mission because it acknowledges governance needs to address it, but it remains uncertain whether the plan itself and the Board's expectations of itself can be operationalized.

## D. Business and Financial Services

### D. 1. Budget

#### Strengths

- Budget is based on anticipated state funding, does not rely on unknown funding, such as federal grant awards.
- Budget aligns with the mission and vision.
- School plans on having public budget meetings and audit available on the website.
- Contact with bank for line of credit.
- Plan for cash reserve by the end of year three.

#### Questions, Concerns

- Application did not include evidence of financial policies or generally accepted standards of practice.
- No contingency for unexpected expenses, no acknowledgement of unanticipated Special education services, or other emergency costs.
- No money specifically for substitute teachers.

### D.2. Financial Management

#### Strengths

- Plan to hire Operations Manager who will have knowledge of financial regulations and systems.

#### Questions, Concerns

- Application does not have evidence of understanding what types of policies and procedures would be required for financial management. This is left to the hiring of an Operations Manager who will have “full authority”.
- No evidence that the school has a system of financial controls or segregation of purchasing, bill payment and reporting of spending.

### D. 3. Facilities

#### Strengths

- Actively seeking a facility.
- Two viable options for facility that are cost effective.

#### Questions, Concerns

- Application does not demonstrate knowledge of facility costs including lease, purchase, renovating that conforms to usage as a school.
- Uncertain if the plan for acquisition and maintenance of a facility is financially viable if nationally based Charter Group does not come through.

### D. 4. Transportation

#### Strengths

- Plan to have parents bring students or carpool if outside the Sanford catchment area.
- Resource for transportation could include York Community Coalition, handicap accessible with a sliding fee.
- \$25,000 in budget.
- Possible transportation via Sanford Schools System.

#### Questions, Concerns

- Inspire ME has had initial talks with Sanford District Schools for shared transportation but no letter affirming a commitment.
- It is unclear if the car-pooling option is viable.

### D.5. Insurance

#### Strengths

- Funds allocated for appropriate insurance coverage.
- Clark Insurance has provided initial cost estimates.

#### Questions, Concerns

- None noted

#### **D. 6. Food Service**

##### Strengths

- All students will be provided with free breakfast, lunch and snacks.

##### Questions, Concerns

- No evidence of contingency plan for students requiring special foods due to a medical condition.

#### **D. 7. Closure Protocol**

##### Strengths

- Shows evidence of an understanding of process needed for closure.
- Meets requirements.

##### Questions, Concerns

- None noted.

### **Business and Financial Services Summary**

Are we convinced that the applicant has operating capital adequate to open the school and for the first years of operation and have a viable sustainable model for the next five years? Describe why or why not.

- Plans are to have reserve by year 3, but supporting documentation not presented.
- It appears that there is sufficient operating capital to open and operate for the first years of the school. However, the applicant does not adequately address internal financial controls, or the policies/procedures that will be in place, and places considerable financial management responsibility on the operations manager without much mention of the supervision of that position. There remains a question about the degree to which there are contingency dollars in the event of unanticipated costs.

Does the Finance Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.

- The Finance Plan is not well developed, leaving much to the Operations Manager to develop policies and practices to ensure financial stability to support the mission and vision of the school.
- It supports it to the extent that there appears to be adequate money to support the applicant's plan.

## E. Education Service Providers

Not applicable

## Application Summary

Are you convinced that this is a unique viable model that will meet the needs of the students it wishes to serve? Describe why or why not.

- The application lacks the depth of knowledge and detail across all four sections Education, Operations, Governance and Finance to be a successful Charter School.
- The applicant has omitted significant components of the required education plan - a curriculum plan for all academic subjects, an assessment system that describes the data used to evaluate student success, a student recruitment plan that correlates with the target population, and a fully formed continuum of services and process/procedural outline for special education and ELL and Gifted and Talented Services. Similarly, there is little or no provision for extra-curricular or co-curricular options.

- Overall Assessment: Would you recommend this application for further consideration by the Commission? We recommend that the Maine Charter School Commission not move this applicant forward to the Public Interview and Hearing phase of the process.

Recommendation:  Deny Approve

